

10 ing under extremely difficult conditions of weather and traffic . . .”*

“When you’re working in natural gas distribution, there’s a saying that everyone’s allowed one mistake — not including losing service to a whole town.”

That’s the rule, according to Bob McBride, Supervisor of Gas Measurement for the Natural Gas Department.

There’s an exception to every rule, and McBride’s natural gas charts graphically portray why the natural gas supply to the entire city of Brandenburg was shut off at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 3.

“In the 80 minutes that passed from the time of the tornado to the time we shut off the gas valves outside Brandenburg, twice as much gas blew into the atmosphere as the town would ever use on a cold winter day,” McBride said.

“There was so much gas blowing it was almost unbelievable that there were no explosions or fires,” Don Dearing added. “Shutting off the town was inevitable.”

As Assistant Superintendent of the Natural Gas Department, Dearing worked from inside as crews in Brandenburg began the tedious task of restoring service on a house-by-house basis with Thursday’s dawn.

A total of 526 customers were without natural gas when the main valve was shut off. All but 157 were back in service as of Friday, April 5, and gas line and meter damages were repaired and services restored to all customers, except the 87 houses demolished, by the following Friday.

The man who shut off those two main valves at the city limits of Brandenburg recalls it as a unique experience.

“I’ve been with the gas company 35 years; I’ve never had to turn off a whole town before,” Edgar Walker said.

The Kentucky town of Campbellsburg avoided that kind of situation two nights earlier when a tornado devastated much of that Henry County community of 500.

The tornado’s force severed natural gas service lines to damaged homes. The threat of explosion and fire also was present there, and there was another complication:

Fire trucks were trapped inside the city’s firehouse by fallen debris.

But L G & E Natural Gas Department crews moved in shortly after the storm and turned off service to 50 of their 146 Campbellsburg customers on a house-by-house basis during the night. On Tuesday morning,

they reassessed damage and restored service to 31 customers. The remaining 19 homes had been destroyed.

While the overall community impact was greater in Brandenburg and Campbellsburg, more natural gas customers were cut off for reasons of safety in Louisville than in those two communities combined.

Stumbling over debris in the gathering darkness, scores of Gas Distribution Department employees, assisted by volunteer firemen, turned off service to 702 homes. They were aware that an explosion or fire could occur at any time.

“We have never faced a situation like this in my experience,” Gas Distribution Department Superintendent Bob Walton said. His experience goes back 25 years.

“You’d have to go back to the high water of 1964 to find any problems caused by Mother Nature that would even begin to compare,” Walton added. “It simply is a miracle that there was not one single natural gas explosion or fire. All of the essential ingredients were there.”

“The prompt restoration of power to the Louisville Water Company pumping station avoided a potentially very dangerous situation . . .”*

When Chuck Randall was able to make his way through the rubble and traffic to assess the damage around the water company pumping station, he knew the job ahead would take a week under normal daylight working conditions.

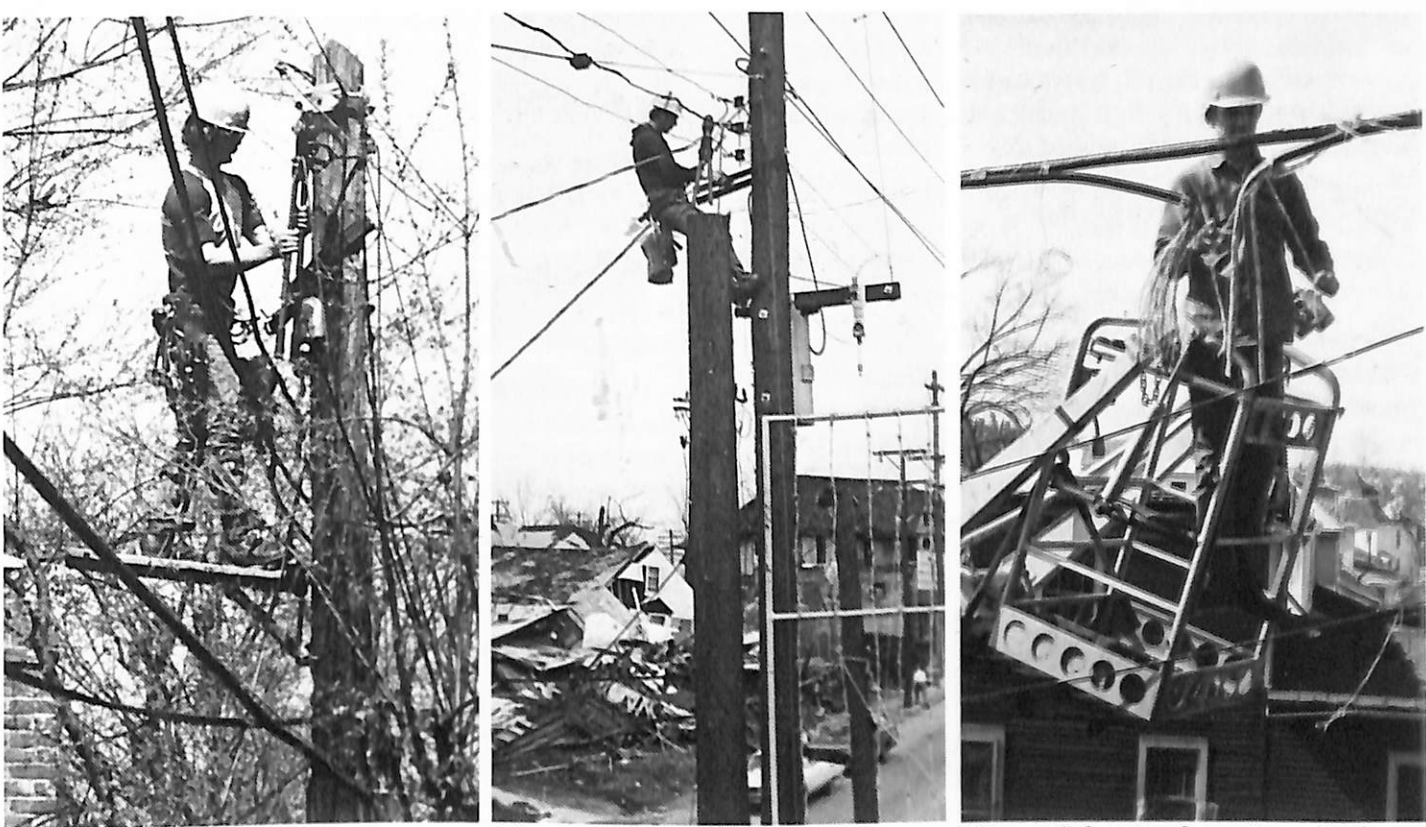
“But I knew we had to get them back in operation a lot sooner than that, and we’d be doing the work at night,” the Trouble Department’s Senior Supervisor said.

“There are three electrical routes to the pumping station, and all of them were destroyed. We had to build a whole new line,” Randall added.

Because the city’s water supply protects the entire community’s health and safety, the project rated a higher priority than restoring service to individual customers or neighborhoods.

“It took me at least an hour to make my way to the scene and another hour to figure out the best way to restore service. Then I couldn’t find a phone that worked. We knew time was precious, but I guess nearly four hours passed after the storm before we could get all our men, equipment and supplies in there and go to work.”

When they went to work, they built a new line from the nearest undamaged 14 KV circuit at the Clifton



Stilz Avenue

Hillcrest Substation Supervisory Cable

substation to the pumping station. The new line required four new poles and five new spans of wire (the length of wire between two poles). To complete the hookup, they had to replace 17 spans of wire which hung broken and tangled from poles that survived the blow.

“We had power to that pumping station at 4:30 a.m. on Thursday. That was probably eight hours of actual work. Everybody I needed was made available to me, and I guess we had 50 or 60 men out there; about as many as we could use without falling all over each other,” Randall said.

One neighbor who watched part of that dramatic action was impressed.

“You should have seen those guys out there,” he said. “They were picking up junk off the street and putting it back up on poles and making it work.”

“Our family is very much aware of how fortunate we were in being spared from any serious damage from the tornado which struck just two blocks from our home. We may have been just a little bit glad that we did suffer some slight inconvenience through the lack of electrical power as it served to remind us of our many blessings that we take for granted . . .”*

For the past nine years, Eddie Hixson has been

L G & E’s one-man Trouble Department in Brandenburg, Meade County and nearby areas. Normally he handles that job quite adequately by himself.

This time he needed a little help.

“I was sitting in my truck at home near Flaherty. We got a hard wind and I could see the tornado headed down toward Irvington.

“I was the first one on the scene there and I reported in that we had five pole structures down and two others that were going to need some help.”

He moved on to assess damage in Brandenburg.

“It was a madhouse, really. The helicopters were grabbing up people to take them to the hospital, and there wasn’t much I could do to help, so I just started restoring electrical service. I had about half the town back on by the time help arrived.”

His work day had started at 7 a.m. Wednesday. It ended at 1:30 a.m. Friday, and then for only five and one-half hours, as he helped to direct the efforts of seven crews sent in to restore service.

“Two very grateful people would like to thank L G & E for heat and lights tonight. It’s been a little chilly and dark for a few days and never did anything feel and look so good as the return of power a few minutes ago . . .”*